DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 466 SO 015 264

AUTHOR Shiang, Julia
TITLE "Heart" and Self in Old Age: A Chinese Model.
INSTITUTION Harvard Univ., Cambridge, Mass. Graduate School of Education.
SPONS AGENCY Bernard Van Leer Foundation, The Hague (Netherlands).
PUB DATE 15 Jun 84
NOTE 48p.; Paper from the Project on Human Potential. For other project papers, see SO 016 244-270.
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aging (Individuals); Anthropology; Case Studies; Child Role; *Chinese Americans; *Chinese Culture; *Cultural Differences; Ethnic Groups; Ethnography; Extended Family; Family Life; Financial Support; *Parent Child Relationship; Parent Role; Sex Role; Social Change; Sociocultural Patterns

ABSTRACT

The relationship between Chinese-Americans and their elderly parents is examined in the context of the Chinese concept of "heart." The Chinese word "heart" expresses a concept central to the dynamics of family transactions and especially to the relationship of elderly parents to adult children. Chinese culture is not a physically or verbally demonstrative one. Caring is often expressed by transactions whose meaning goes beyond the presentation of the gift. "Heart" means to be thinking about the other person, to be willing to provide, and to anticipate desires rather than wait for requests. This study focuses on such transactions between parents and children in 22 Chinese American families living in the Boston area. It covers an 18-month period. Children who had been financially provided for were now expected to show "heart" by providing for their parents. Not all were equally willing to do so. Some withheld support or moved away as a way of expressing their independence. Differences were found both within and between families as they adpated to a new culture. Change was also evident in an increasing reliance on daughters as well as on sons. (IS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED254466

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Julia Shiang
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

"Heart" and Self in Old Age: A Chinese Model

Julia Shiang

June 15, 1984

Papers from the Bernard Van Leer Foundation
Project on Human Potential

Gutman Library

Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

SP 016 264

*Not for quotation or reproduction without permission of the author.

DRAFT

June 15, 1984

Julia Shiang

"Heart" and Self in Old Age: A Chinese Model

The Chinese word "heart" expresses a concept central to the dynamics of family transactions. This essay will explore the meanings of this term and suggest how these affect the self-images of both parents and children, and ultimately, the meaning of intimate relationships in Chinese culture. We will examine the dynamics of how the generations attempt to achieve a satisfactory balance between being close to each other and being separate from one another. This will help us explain, for example, why parents would give one child a loan and not another, why a son would suddenly get married when his mother developed cancer, or why a child would absolutely refuse to ask his parents for a loan.

We will examine the meanings attached to transactions between parents and children. When a parent gives her child a sofa for their new house, the sofa is the object being transferred. But there can be a message associated with the object; this is a meaning connected to the transfer. The message might be "I am giving you something so you will

remember me," or it might be "If you accept this, you will owe me something later." The impact of these messages on parent-child relations are the focus of study.

The present study focuses on relationships between elderly parents (average age of parents was 65 years) and their adult children in 22 Chinese families living in Greater Boston and its suburbs.[2] In this essay I will speak about a 'median' level of interaction, behavior, or belief -- around which there is rich and subtle variation. Sixteen of the families had lived in the U.S. for more than twenty years. All parents, with the exception of two, were born in China, presently the People's Republic of China. The total number of parents, adult children, and grandchildren in the sample was 117. The present essay stems from earlier work (Shiang, 1984) conducted on the analysis of the content, direction, frequency, and quantity of transactions between parents and children over an 18 month period.

I. Transactions as a way of expressing feelings and binding families together

It is necessary to make clear the impact transactions have for the population under study. In general Americans express their feelings both through actions and words. A gift is given. One says, "I like you." In love relationships great emphasis is placed on getting the lover

to acknowledge feelings through words, to say out loud that "four letter word," LOVE (Bob Dylan). But most of the elderly Chinese in the sample do not talk openly about their feelings; the appropriate medium for the expression of feelings is through presentations. An elderly widow explained it this way:

> Of course, you love your own daughter. It doesn't show much--it's not something we talk about. But a parent has love for their children. I suppose you could say we did little things like [giving] birthday presents.

A young Chinese woman, Deborah, raised in the U.S., concurred:

> I remember every time I left home [on a long trip] I would give my mother a peck. She didn't exactly force me away, but she didn't really encourage me either... In our family love was based more on respect and understanding...we don't have any great demonstrations of affection or talks between us. It is all low-key. You read alot through actions.

Most of the parents do not say "I love you" directly to a child; affection is implied when the parent gives "a little something" special, sews a jacket, or remembers that the grandchildren need new slippers.

But not all children understand the absence of the verbal expression of affections and the meaning attributed to "gifts." One young man wasn't clear about reconciling the differences between his parents' behaviors and what he saw as

appropriate American parental behavior. They gave him gifts but he felt something was lacking. His sister described it,

> He came to me and said, 'Deborah, I think there's something wrong with our family.' Of course, he didn't state it in such a direct way. He really hemmed and hawed. He said, 'We don't touch or kiss or anything as a family.'

He wonders about his parents' affections. Yet his parents, from their point of view, have been appropriately expressing their desire to have him emotionally close by providing appropriate gifts.

The Concept of "Heart": The Sentiment that Binds

Transactions symbolize the sentiment that bind together parents and children. The Chinese expression, having "heart" was used by the elderly in speaking about the quality of the relationship they wanted with their adult children. "Heart" is , xin, a Chinese character that literally means heart, the organ in the body. The heart is seen as the center of emotions as evidenced by the use of the radical in many words denoting emotional states.

In the specific context of parent-child relations, the

elderly interviewed used the expression having "heart" in two ways:

a) "ni hao you xin" (Mandarin) or "neih hou yauh sam" (Cantonese) you have very much heart, you are very thoughtful, very kind

b) "you xin" or "yauh sam" showing heart, expressing kindness, thoughtfulness, to be kindhearted in deed

For example, one elderly woman said she had done enough for all her children including seeing them all married, living in houses, and having their own families with good earnings. Now that she was older, she said,

> What I want is their heart and recognition of me and my husband. My son told me to really enjoy myself. If I want to gamble, I can gamble. I need not be worried with money. If I lose everything, I can come live with him and his wife. I felt very comforted and touched by what he said despite the fact that he may not be able to live up to his promises. He has the heart for me. 829

"Heart" is to be thinking about the other person and to be willing to provide. It is expressed when her children tell her that now it is time for her to enjoy herself; she has worked hard enough. After many years of running a laundry business and raising her children, she now expects them to be connected to her by actively thinking of her and meeting some of her needs.

<u>How do people show "heart?"</u>

An earlier quantitative analysis of transactions (Shiang, 1984) between family members showed that of all the transactions that took place between family members, the transfer of money occurred most frequently. Twenty-one of the 22 families in the sample reported at least one transfer of money. Most were engaged in multiple transfers of money that involved actual cash flow both from parent to child and from child to parent. Money was also given by parents to children specifically earmarked as downpayments for buying a house. I looked at reasons people gave for engaging in such transactions. What meanings did the individuals attribute to their money transactions?

One of the primary reasons was need. In one family, a daughter and her husband realized that her parents had lost a great deal of money in the stock market.

> ...we knew that they had bought stocks and lost heaviliy. So we knew that they needed money...no they didn't ask [us]... we initially sent them about $100 a month and by the time my father died, it was close to $450 a month... they were grateful...607

One elderly man and his wife, now living in goverment subsidized housing, gave all five of his children money for downpayments.

> Altogether I gave about $80,000 to the children. The pension money is all spread out, we don't want the money. If they [the children] have a difficult situation, I want to help. Last year my youngest daughter wanted to buy a second house to rent [out],

> so I loaned them $5000, no interest. If they don't want to refund, then forget it, it doesn't matter.

This father clearly states the attitude of many parents. Parents have made money and "giving [money] to children is what it is for.."

But even as these informants speak about the economic aspects of money transactions, they see such transactions as a way to show care and concern toward others. One elderly widow said,

> One can give money to one's parents anytime. When [the child] gets a job, she can give money to her mother on her birthday.

The woman then advised the interviewer to

> find excuses to give money to your mother. You should buy a piece of chicken leg and Chinese fried dumplings on your mother's birthday. In China, you could include money as part of gifts to parents. You could put money in red bags that were considered as lucky money. . .

The transaction of money was also seen as a way of maintaining communication between the generations. Children in the sample paid back their parents when they could. As one father said,

> I didn't ask them (to return the money) but now (my youngest daughter) is giving $500 each month. It is good for them, to like to help! 610

He sees this interchange as a vehicle through which the

children can learn about parental needs. Frequent phone calls and letters allow him to mention casually his needs and the urgency of the situation.

It is important to remember the historical fact that many parents have maintained monetary transactions for many years with their own parents in China, Taiwan, or Hong Kong. Many of these relations spanned more than 30 years. In some cases it was the grandparents in the U.S. sending money back to their sons in Taiwan or Hong Kong to be used for investments. For most however, it was the parents who sent monthly allowances to their own parents. In any case, money was often the vehicle through which contact between the generations was made. While this was seen as an obligation for some, others saw money transactions as a symbol of the "heart" and concern that should exist between the generations. This aspect was emphasized most often when young adults spoke about their perception of the meaning attached to money. One college educated daughter said,

> I sent some [money] back [to my parents] not because they need it but because I think they're happier knowing that I'm thinking about them...I sent some on Chinese New Year and my mother was really pleased. She wrote me a note saying how pleased she was, and how she had sent money to her mother, and now we were continuing the tradition. 826

One woman described her older sister's method of giving money to her parents.

> We are expected not only to spend time with them [parents], but also to contribute

> financially once we are working. This is true even of my older sister who is married and living somewhere else...she helps out...she disguises it...by sending several tens of dollars on their birthdays and other special occasions. My mother is not a tyrant who can compel a child to give a specific amount each month. 812

Another young woman, is an assistant professor in a Massachusetts college, was asked whether her parents had ever talked about being taken care of in old age. She replied that they didn't expect to live together but they had made clear their expectation of support.

> My parents think we are awful, especially me. I'm the worst. My parents already expect financial support saying, 'It's not that we really want your money. It's just a measure of how much you care...When I finished college and worked for five months...I sent them my very first paycheck. It was sort of symbolic. 882

Besides the transfer of money, the giving of services was also seen as an appropriate way of expressing "heart." Parents and children gave each other help in the areas of companionship, cooking and housekeeping, transportation, child care, home maintenance. Families exchanged store-bought items, handmade gifts, and advice concerning business, health, and home buying. One young woman bought a house in the same neighborhood as her mother and "checked-in" with her on a regular basis.

> That way we can serve them better. I don't mean to serve them all day long, but just be available. They know if something happens, we can be there right away. 825

Analysis of the Concept of 'Heart'

A review of all the interviews revealed four aspects of having "heart" as most important to the informants; each is an area where a problem in communication of a misunderstanding between the generations can cause a breakdown in relations. The likelihood that heart is expressed properly is greatly increased when the children have been explicitly taught the proper conduct or when the family is surrounded by others who can admonish and correct improper behavior.

1. Heart involves the anticipation of needs. Since actions count more than words (see above), the anticipation of needs also carries extra weight. On should not just provide a gift of service but one should be able to anticipate the need without being told. To be told explicitly what is needed is to cheapen the relationship. A number of parent-child conflicts centered around the adult child's failure to anticipate or thoroughly consider his or her parents' needs appropriately. While it may be that the child merely did not know of the need, the parent's view is that the child is neglectful, unsympathetic, and uncaring. Parents expect their children to be thinking about them and to know beforehand what they might want. She counts on her second daughter and her youngest son to anticipate her needs.

2. Children should initiate acts that show heart. Children are responsible for contacting parents, inviting them out, giving parents the option of joining them for holiday celebrations. Parents should not have to initiate. The child who has heart finds ways of "checking in" with parents so that parents can then let the child know about their specific needs. In one family the children were paying more than a thousand dollars each month for their mother to stay in a nursing home. But the elderly woman didn't have any pocket money to buy a book or a gift. Because of this, she was unhappy. From her point of view, the children should have been able to anticipate what she needed; they certainly had enough money. Because children are supposed to initiate this kind of giving, she felt that she could not directly ask for a few extra dollars. The children wondered why she complained about little things each time they met. They were left at an impasse, in a situation satisfactory to none. In the eyes of her elderly friend, the children were not meeting their responsibility to their parent.

3. Awareness of need must be expressed by appropriate actions. It is not enough for an adult child to express sympathy; showing heart involves action and not just "empty talk." Knowledge of a need must be expressed through doing or giving something, however small. Small "tokens" such as gifts, money, or a small service on a special occasion convey the idea that one is thinking and concerned about the person.

The tokens are symbolic of a readiness or willingness on the part of the other person to be available if needed. Furthermore, actions must take place in an appropriate manner. Children must be able to discriminate between proper and improper actions. As we have seen, gifts of money are most frequently used to convey heart. Obviously, services given in appropriate form may also convey concern and caring.

4. Children's appropriate actions play a critical role in both the elder's self-image and in the adult child's self-image. The presentation of oneself to others outside the family plays a central role in determining self-image. Signs of children's care and concern are more readily apparent when relatives and friends can "see" such acts taking place. Everyone understands the positive implications for one's self image when a daughter-in-law serves tea during a mah-jong game with friends. Weekly dinners in Chinatown with all the family present are a sign to others of family harmony. Telling one's friends that children are home for the holidays can boost a parent's image, but there is less concrete evidence of concerned children since there is no presentation in a public setting. When children understand the various forms of heart and the appropriate manner in which it is to be expressed, then both parents and children gain in several ways. They reinforce their own images of themselves as responsible, mature adults -- in the parenting role and in the caring child role. They may also garner the

respect and admiration of others in the presentation of their public selves.

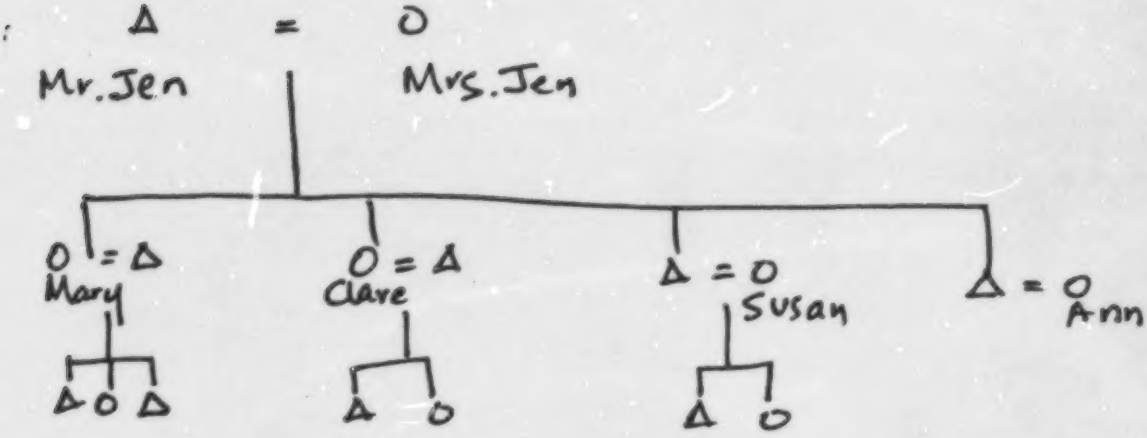
We now turn to a family case study to illustrate the various and subtle ways in which family members do and do not express "heart."

II. The Jens

Mrs. Jen specifically said that what she wanted from her children in old age is "their heart and recognition." Mr. and Mrs. Jen, in their early 70's, live in the suburbs of Boston surrounded by their four adult children. In fact, their two sons live above and below them in separate apartments in the Jens' house. Their daughters live with their families in two houses only ten minutes away. Mr. and Mrs. Jen have a high number of transactions with their children.

I will discuss some of the differences among the children in their interactions with their parents to illustrate the various ways parents and children express "heart."

family tree



family tree

When she was nine years old the oldest daughter, Mary, was left in China by her mother (her father was already in the U.S.) to live with her grandparents. When the Japanese entered their area, she and her maternal grandmother fled to Hong Kong where she grew up. Her parents sent her $600 a year for support-- quite a lot of money in those days. She was able to go to school and later met her husband through a cousin. Once she was married, her parents stopped sending her money. For ten years, Mary took care of her father's mother in Hong Kong. Later the grandmother was brought to the U.S. by the Jens and cared for in their home until her death. Mary and her family emigrated to the U.S. five years ago, and now live in a house owned by her father. All the other Jen children were born and brought up in the U.S.

Parents' View of Family Loyalty

Every Tuesday night, Mrs. Jen has the whole family for dinner. She cooks a huge meal for her eight children and seven grandchildren-- they have to set out two tables to seat everyone. For fourteen years, Mrs. Jen "has insisted [they] have this dinner for the sake of family unity and contact with one another." In their living room hangs an embroidered

tapestry of five pairs of birds. Mr. Jen pointed out that each symbolized a different aspect of the unity and harmony which one hopes to characterize family relationships. One bird symbolizes loyalty; another symbolizes long life. Mr. and Mrs. Jen sold their laundry business and are now retired. They spend their days shopping, playing mah-jong, reading the newspaper, sewing clothes, and visiting with friends. Although their schedules are not the same, both Mr. and Mrs. Jen accomodate and support each other. Their marriage is an example of how well a "blind" marriage[4] can work out. When the interviewer asked about old age and when a person could be considered old, they spoke in animated tones and with such excitement they couldn't wait for the other to stop talking.

> People in the village didn't mind the fact that they were getting old. As a matter of fact, people didn't mind being called "louh minh" (old lady) because other people would give more respect to them. Their social status would be higher. When young people had problems, they would be advised to ask the 'old' ones. The old people are supposed to have more living experience. In the village, people would value the experience on has rather than the amount of education one has. The old people do have more experience than the young people [emphasis by Mrs. Jen].

Traditionally, the oldest son's wife would assume the responsibilities of taking care of the aging parents. It was asumed that one's daughters would shift their loyalty to their husband's family after marriage. And when the interviewer asked how this attitude had changed, Mrs. Jen answered,

> I know at least half the Chinese families [in

> the U.S.] are not living with their elderly parents...I know many cases where the mother-in-law was kicked out of their children's house.

But she blamed this discord not only on the children but also on the mother in law.

> The mother-in-law still thinks her son is still hers whether he is married or not. Little do they know that women [in the U.S.] have more authority than they had in China. Men listen to their wives more.

Mrs. Jen realizes she cannot control her children and even though she obviously wishes for the "old days", she understands her role must be more circumspect. Yet she insists on holding Tuesday night dinners so the whole family can get together regularly.

Variations in Family Transactions

Mr. and Mrs. Jen's different relations with their children can be seen in the varying transaction patterns they have with each. In the following section I focus on transactions with their daughters and daughters-in-law as a way to illustrate the various ways these can vary within one family.

When the interviewer praised Mr. and Mrs. Jen for all they have provided for their children, Mrs. Jen was quick to reply that her oldest daughter, Mary did not appreciate what

they had given her. After all, they had provided $600 a year for more than ten years, and a house when she arrived in the U.S. Her daughter still thought that the house she received was "an old and worn-out one." When Mary and her husband went to China, they didn't tell the parents until a few days before they left. In contrast, their second daughter asked her mother to accompany them on their trip to China. Even if Mrs. Jen didn't want to go with Mary and her family, she still expected that it should have been her choice to refuse. Another incident reinforced Mrs. Jen's view that in spite of the fact she has given Mary a lot, her daughter does not show her the proper respect. Mary's teenage daughter came to do some housecleaning for her. After completing some of the chores, the girl started complaining about being tired. In order to urge her granddaughter to finish the tasks, Mrs. Jen told her that when her second daughter was young she had started cooking at the age of 12 and ironed clothes even earlier. Mrs. Jen later told Mary how her daughter hadn't completed the tasks. Mary's reply was, "Each person has a different fate. Some people are born to suffer all their life and some people are born to enjoy." The implication was that Mrs. Jen was born to suffer and it was just too bad because that was her fate. Mary was not going to make her daughter behave in the way Mrs. Jen thought she should. While Mrs. Jen related this information to the interviewer, Mr. Jen was silent, and appeared to agree with his wife.

Over the years, tensions between the oldest daughter and her mother have developed; Mrs. Jen feels her daughter doesn't appreciate and respect her. Perhaps Mary feels she was abandoned in Hong Kong and that no amount of money could make up for what she had to suffer. She sees herself as having endured more than her mother, and that her daughter will not, if she can help it, suffer in the same way. She had already taken care of her grandmother for ten years; she doesn't need to continue proving that she is a caring daughter. Perhaps Mrs. Jen gave her daughter a "torn and worn-out" house with the hopes that Mary would take the responsibility to fix it up herself, but without saying so explicitly. So when no improvements are made on the house, the mother silently despairs. Using Clare, her second daughter, as a model of proper behavior in admonishing her granddaughter only serves to reinforce the differences between mother and daughter. While mother and daughter have transactions with each other (the weekly dinner, the house the daughter lives in) most probably neither derives satisfaction from these interactions, and as more incidents reveal this tension, the distance between them is reinforced. Mrs. Jen feels her image of herself as a "responsible" mother to Mary is not enhanced. Mary feels her efforts are not appreciated; she is not reinforced in her own self-image as a "responsible" daughter.

In contrast, Mrs. Jen's relationship with her second

daughter, Clare, is supportive and mutually enhancing. Clare works in Chinatown in a community support program and both parents are proud of her accomplishments. Mr. Jen said, "she is doing something good for Chinese people and is getting to be an important person. She is getting greater as she does more." He beamed as Mrs. Jen talked about this daughter; she confirms the image they have of themselves as responsible parents. When Mr. Jen turned 60 years old, Clare gave her parents $2000. They put the money in a joint bank account that they and Clare have shared ever since she was young -- they will use it "if there is an emergency." She offered her father a monthly allotment of money saying she wanted to pay him a nominal rent even though she doesn't live in a house he owns. He waved his hand, "I did not let her." On her parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary, Clare gave them two plane tickets to L.A. and accompanied them. Besides providing these tokens of concern, she and her mother also share a passion for recreational gambling. Mrs. Jen feels that she should be able to gamble now that she is retired and every week she plays mah-jong. Clare also likes to gamble and invited her mother down to the horse races in New Jersey. Mrs. Jen said, "My husband does not like to be adventurous...I was very excited to go to this place..." But not all social events work out; Clare asked her to go to a Mandarin opera, but Mrs. Jen said "it was boring and I could not understand what it was all about." There is warmth and room for disagreements between the two women. Mrs. Jen says

with pride, "Clare refuses to buy jackets at the department store because she says I make warmer ones." Mrs. Jen feels that her efforts are unconditionally appreciated.

Yet another pattern has evolved with her oldest son's wife, Susan. The son had reached his 30's without marrying, and according to his father, was "unable to find someone in Boston that fitted what he wanted." Mrs. Jen activated her network of relatives and friends and took her son to Hong Kong to meet prospective spouses. Mrs. Jen was instrumental in choosing Susan as her son's spouse and Susan is most probably grateful for having the opportunity to come to the U.S. But it also appears that Susan would like to maintain some distance from her parents-in-law. For example, even though the couple live in an apartment just above his parents, Susan made it clear to her mother-in-law that she would not accept any clothes made by the grandmother. Mr. Jen said, "She prefers to buy things from the store." Whether this was the real reason was hard to tell, but Susan's refusal places a distance between herself and he mother-in-law, a woman who takes pride in the fact that she makes most of her own clothes by hand. Susan may have given her mother-in-law the message that she is not willing to assume the traditional role, as oldest son's wife, of caring for her aging parents-in-law in their last years of life.

The second son's wife, Ann, was born in the U.S. Mrs.

Jen referred to her as the "siu sam pouh" (small daughter-in-law), an affectionate term. The Jens' second son is the "baby" of the family' both parents hold a special sort of affection for him. With obvious pleasure, they told the interviewer about the serie of events that led their son to be quite content to live surrounded by family. At age 18 he tried living apart from his parents by getting an apartment with friends. It didn't work; he loaned money to unreliable friends and his apartment mates never paid their share of the rent. In the end, his parents bailed him out and "since then he never wanted to live outside [the parents' home] again." Mrs. Jen and her son also share the same love for gambling -- and now that he is making a sizable profit on his restaurant, he told his mother that she should gamble. He says he will take care of her if she has any problems. His wife, Ann, agrees fully. "He has the heart for me, " said Mrs. Jen, expressing her feeling of closeness to this son and daughter-in-law.

Forms of "Heart" Expressed Through Transaction

Mrs. Jen's second daughter, Clare, and her second son are tightly bound to the mother through appropriate transactions which symbolize "heart". By offering gifts, Clare continually demonstrates to her mother that she is thinking about her parents. Physical proximity obviously serves to support an emotional closeness but living nearby

does not necessarily mean that parent and child will be emotionally close such is the case with Mrs. Jen and her first daughter.

Mrs. Jen feels that her own image of herself as a responsible mother is enhanced through her transactions with her second daughter and her youngest daughter-in-law. This is a mutual process; each person's self-image is enhanced as their actual transaction pattern closely approximates their idea of how transactions should take place within the family. The two young women get positive satisfaction from their part in giving to the parents. On the other hand, the oldest daughter feels excluded and finds transactions with the family only a reminder of how she doesn't measure up to family expectations. But the fact that she is willing to continue engaging with her mother suggests that she is still attempting to work out their relationship. When Mrs. Jen's first daughter-in-law distances herself by refusing to carry on certain transactions, she is reinforcing her separateness.

IV. The Traditional Model in Contemporary Perspective

What standard for behavior in relationships is used by family members in determining what constitutes proper and appropriate transactions? The fact that all the families in the sample have experienced migration leads us to consider two factors that affect family functioning: (a) the

traditional Chinese ideal of parent-child relations in parents' old age that these parents brought with them from the old country, and (b) the way these ideals have changed as expressed by present-day examples of 'good' and 'bad' models of behavior used by parents to educate their children about proper and improper behavior. It is then possible to contrast these two factors with actual patterns of care as illustrated by the transactions that occurred between parents and children in the sample.

The Traditional Chinese Ideal

The traditional Confucian ideal of family relations made explicit the nature of the reciprocal relations between parents and children. Parents give to children when they are young and receive in old age. The force of this obligation to parents was particularly strong due to the cultural practice of linking it to keeping one's ancestors happy (Hsu, 1948). Secondly, the relation between caring for one's parents and the definition of the 'good' person was clearly defined in the concept of "jen"; or "humanness, reciprocity in desirable act, fellow feeling" (Richards, 1932: 69). One aspect of "jen" lies in "serving the parents and with every effort to strive for mutuality and so act..." (Mencius,: 353). The specific word, "xiao" is used to define the obligation that children should show their parents in old age. One shows filial piety toward parents with 'heart.'

One of the stories from The Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Piety from China illustrates the strength of the tie between parents and children.

> A boy, Wu Meng, lived with his parents during the Chin Dynasty (4th century A.D.). They were so poor they could not afford to furnish their beds with mosquito nets. Every night mosquitos attacked them without restraint feasting upon their flesh and blood. Seeing his parents thus annoyed in their sleep, the boy felt a great grief in his heart. He took off his clothes to attract the mosquitos. Even though he felt the pain from their attacks, he would not drive them away for fear they might go attack his parents instead. He would rather endure the suffering for the sake of his parents.

While this and other stories in the Twenty-Four Examples are extreme in their caricature of parent-child relations, they were effectively used for centuries to inculcate proper relations between parents and children. They indicate the importance of serving one's parents for as long as one lived. Chinese parents could plan for retirement and old age with certainty that one of their children, usually a son, would provide for them as they withdrew from the more productive sphere of society. Daughters did not take on this responsibility for their own parents, but once in their husband's household, they assumed major roles in caring for their parents-in-law.

> Filial piety demands absolute obedience and complete devotion to the parents....In traditional society an individual from childhood to the end of his life was completely immersed in an atmosphere which compelled the observation of filial piety

(Yang, 1959: 86).

Numerous studies of Chinese families (Freedman 1970, Lang) point to the force of this reciprocal relationship; parents give to children when they are young and receive in old age.

It is this ideal that the Chinese brought with them as they settled in the U.S. Of course, the way in which the ideal was worked out by each family, even in China, deviated from the ideal. A study of these differences is found in the work of Ikels (1980). Ikels contrasts rural and urban solutions to old age using a number of factors important in determining the position of the elderly in a culture. For China, she suggests that "practical economic considerations, supernatural sanctions, structural factors, the force of public opinion,...and self-interest...all combined to ensure that the village elderly were granted their due" (1980:88). The norm of reciprocity was held intact in the village setting. In contrast, the population of urban elderly pre-1949 was actually very small and the relatively greater instability of personal relationships contributed to a much less sure existence for the elderly in the last years of their lives. The ideal of parent-child reciprocity was not as easily achieved. However, the ideal was clear and attaining a close approximation to the ideal meant that parents could then view themselves as having fulfilled parental responsibilities and children could view themselves

as filial children.

Present-Day 'Good' and 'Bad' Models

We now turn to consider present-day examples of 'good' and 'bad' parent-child interactions. These are particularly interesting in that they are a powerful force in the setting of a standard and the teaching of proper and improper behaviors. Many elderly have heard of these models and soon they become the model 'to emulate' or the model 'to avoid becoming at all costs.'

Models to Emulate. Several informants spoke about a woman, Mrs. Wang who was "an excellent example of taking care of her husband's mother for a long period of time." The whole extended family deserved merit for the care they took of the aging grandmother, but this woman deserved special credit because it was she who really maintained the day to day care. Everyone in her circle of friends knew of her devotion and spoke about her in glowing terms concerning her filial behavior. When Mrs. Wang was interviewed, she minimized her burden:

> Grandmother rotated among her four children in the U.S. Everyone expressed enthusiasm that she should stay with them even though I think she really preferred to stay with her oldest son -- she thought her place was here. In our house, grandmother was mobile and wanted to try to help cook a dish. But that would be too much and she would get tired. She was fairly easy to get along with -- she

> was not an emotional type, but very logical. About a year before she died, the whole Chinese community [friends around Boston and New York] had a party with 150 people to celebrate her 80th birthday. 601

Grandmother lived with her daughter-in-law for 15 years. She did live with the other children for extended periods of time. In fact, a daughter and son-in-law also took care of the grandmother despite the fact that the daughter, herself, had been "given away" to another family as a young child for five or more years. "There were just too many girls in the family."

Mrs. Wang spoke about the experience of having grandmother in the household while she was still having children.

> It was good for them [the children] when they were really young to have a grandmother play with them. They grew up with her. In fact my youngest daughter was born after grandmother came to the United States and the third child was only 17 months old. It was natural.

Her youngest daughter, concurred, and spoke with obvious warmth about her grandmother.

> I remember grandmother very well and I also have fond memories when I see the old pictures. She would make things. I was intrigued by her bound feet -- she would make her own shoes with a pattern using vises to hold the material together. It was very clever. I drank Pepsi and she could open the bottle with her own hands -- she was very strong. I tried to do it but couldn't. She made origami animals and tried to teach us.

> She would sit in her bedroom...and we would visit her, sit with her and talk with her. She would teach us things -- she was a part of my life. She tried to learn English -- just a few words but soon would forget them. She couldn't absorb them. But I would teach her words -- the younger teaching the older-- and this made me feel good. [Grandmother] being there definitely was not negative! It was taken for granted that she was supposed to be there.

Later in the interview series, the young woman spoke about what she would do for her own parents.

> I have felt very strongly that my parents would live with me. The thought of putting my parents in a nursing home is very repulsive to me. When I said this to my mother, I also said that this would not be a burden on me. 603

Negative Models. We now turn to examine the families that were cited as having problems. Much discussion and gossip surrounded the "stories" of these families; it was clear that the informants felt they must avoid "ending up like this." Some of the examples centered around being put in nursing homes:

> Mrs. Wong lived far away from her children; they had all moved away. Now she was getting old and the children wanted to put her in a nursing home, but she fought it. She didn't want to and resisted.

Other examples focused on the loss of friends and familiar surroundings.

> One old man had a heart problem, he was already 86 years old. His daughter convinced him to move to California to be with her, but

> he lost his friends. He didn't have a place to read -- he used to go to the [Asian] library at Harvard. . .

The old man seemed to just fade away. He died less than a year after his move.

The following example of a 'bad' model focuses on troubled relations and their effect on family transactions.

Mrs. Wu, took care of her mother for nearly 16 years in Hong Kong before she came to the U.S. During those years she said she had "done her duty" by helping her mother in many ways. Her mother said she didn't want to be a burden and offered Mrs. Wu fifty dollars (Hong Kong currency) a month but she did not take the money,

> I would feel shameful to accept my mother's money. It is my duty to take care of my mother.

At the same time, her brother, already living in the U.S., was sending the mother about 40 U.S. dollars each month. Even though Mrs. Wu left Hong Kong to live with her husband in the U.S., she still continued to send money to her mother by sending it through friends and requesting them to buy her mother food and clothes. After a while, she began to realize that the relatives taking care of her mother were abusing her by locking her out of the house and giving her little to eat.

> Another relative saw my mother one day sitting in front of the house of the relative

> where she was supposed to be staying. Mu asked how she was doing. She said she was locked out again...she did not dare go outside because the relative would not let her in the house...she wished she had a chicken leg to eat. 913

Mrs. Wu had already tried to bring her mother over to the U.S. but her own limited financial resources prohibited this. She contacted her brother and sister who lived with their families on the West Coast only a block apart from each other. Eventually, Mrs. Wu's own son applied for the old mother to come to the U.S. Arrangements were made so that she would spend the weekdays with the sister and weekends with the brother.

> When everything was ready, we contacted my oldest brother to confirm his commitment. He said he needed to talk with his wife and would call back. When he called back, he sounded unsure. His wife had talked to my sister...and said something to upset my sister...they had an argument. I found out that my brother did not want to be responsible for all the expenses my mother might impose on him such as medical and funeral expenses... unfortunately, the brother did not want mother to come. He felt it would be too much for him. My sister was upset with him and his wife because he is the oldest son and is responsible for taking care of mother in her old age. She is the daughter and would not take the responsibility that should be his. She was so upset that she never had any contact with his family any more though they live only a few streets apart.

Mrs. Wu was also upset,

> My brother owns a chicken farm. He owns a house and a car...My sister married a business man from the Philippines. All her

> children have been able to attend universities and have good jobs. She has a house and several cars. Besides, she is not working and travels to different cities in the U.S. If she has the money to travel, she must have enough to support mother. After all, how much can an old person eat?

While her mother was alive, Mrs. Wu received $200 designated for her daughter. She complained, "What nice jewelry can $200 buy?" She asked her mother to leave a ring to her son; it had been passed from generation to generation and was quite valuable. But the woman refused, saying that the ring would be given to her son's wife. "Even though my brother did not treat her nicely, my mother favored the son more than anybody else." When Mrs. Wu's mother died, it was discovered that she had squirreled away nearly ten thousand dollars in her bank account in Hong Kong. No one had been aware of the money. In her will, Mrs. Wu's mother gave the bulk of it to her son, his wife, and children. She even took care of the son's adopted son. But to Mrs. Wu and her children she only left a small amount; Mrs. Wu complained that "it was unfair." After all, Mrs. Wu had tried as hard as she could to help her mother over all those years and her brother had refused. The favoritism her mother showed to her brother was an important factor in coloring Mrs. Wu's relationship with her brother and sister. Mrs. Wu felt bitter; she had been cheated but what could she do?

A family with troubled relations is not merely seen as

lacking in something; it is seen as failing. The parents cannot be seen as responsible parents and their children are not filial.

Actual Patterns of Transactions

What models did parents provide their children in caring for their grandparents? Of the sample of 22 families, 11 (50%) parents provided a 'live' model of daily care for aging grandparents to younger, growing children. In this process, children are made more thoughtful about what is required in the care of an older person. Learning is casual, a part of everyday life. When the time comes for that grown child to decide whether to care for his or her aging parent, the inclination to care is based on past experience. This is shown in the following results: Of the 11 parents who provided a 'live' model, five (45%) parents showed a present pattern of co-residency with adult children. Of these same 11 families, three (27%) parents had spent a short period of time "trying out" living with children in the children's household. The hope is that by living together for a period of time, both generations will learn whether co-residence is feasible in the future. Eight families showed a pattern where the parents provided no 'live' model because of physical distance and only sent money back to grandparents in China. Of these eight families, none (0%) showed a pattern of

co-residency with adult children and only one (12%) had spent an extended period of time living with children. The presence of a 'live' is associated with co-residency and the willingness to try living with adult children. (See Shiang, 1984 for statistical analysis).

While it is also apparent from the 'models' discussed above that many parents still look to their sons to provide 'heart' in the traditional vein, there is evidence that more and more parents in the U.S. setting look to their daughters, rather than their sons to provide 'heart' in their old age. This is particularly true for those elderly who do not require financial assistance after retirement as shown in the following chart.

Proximity of Elderly to Geographically Closest Adult Child
(N=15)

	Transaction Patterns			
	Middle Income Families		Upper-Middle Income Families	
	son	daughter	son	daughter
Proximity of closest child				
co-resident or same building	4	1*	0	0

closeby	0	1	2	1
more than 50 miles away	0	0	3	3
Total	4	2	5	4

* Living with daughter, but explicitly stated that the target child is a son.

The chart shows that children of middle income parents are living closer to parents than children of upper-middle income parents. Transactions that occurred with parents of the middle income group generally took place with the most proximate sons whereas transactions for the upper-middle income group took place with both daughters and sons. Thus, while the traditional norm exerts a strong influence in the choice of which child is most proximate and carrying on transactions with parents, the data suggest that in higher socioeconomic groups the expression of 'heart' can now be more easily cultivated with a daughter.

The Consequences of Showing and Not Showing 'Heart'

As family members judge their behaviors according to these standards, is 'heart' expressed in a satisfying manner?

How do parents and children negotiate a closeness that is satisfactory to both generations? Parents in the sample were quite active in their attempts to influence their children, especially in the areas of marital choice, career choice, and cultivating relations with one child who is most 'sympathetic' to their situation (Shiang, 1984). Not surprisingly family members sometimes don't see eye to eye in negotiating this closeness. This happenned in at least two ways: in some families it is the parents who don't meet the image that children have of family closeness; in some families, children maintain greater distance than parents desire. For the most part, parents and children both engage in a process of delicate balancing; on one hand, they try to preserve a separateness from the family and on the other hand, they try to achieve a satisfactory closeness.

For example, not all parents want to make themselves available to their children. Some parents would rather not babysit, to the chagrin of their children. Parents feel they have their own lives to live. Some parents say they have "to rely on no one but themselves" and stress their own independence from children. Some parents may insist on being independent to avoid the onus of not meeting the parental goal of raising concerned children. Their statements may also reflect the fact that the daily lives of elderly people simply do not revolve around children. In one family, the daughter said she realized that since her parents had moved

away from Boston, she had to be more active in trying to preserve ties with her parents. When it was clear that her parents weren't coming to see their second newborn child, she and her husband packed up and flew to where the parents lived. She said,

> My mother said she couldn't come because she had been sick but I knew that they were also very busy with their own lives. So we went there. Even though it was a lot of trouble for us, I wanted the three generations to be together. I really wanted my mother to have a chance to see her granddaughter when she was just born -- to have a sort of bonding between them. 620

At the same time, she also realized that if her parents were to live with her right now, it wouldn't be so easy.

> My mother and I were talking -- we sort of agreed that she got along better right now with my brother's wife -- she's from Hong Kong and -- she has less conflict with my mother... my mother's values and mine just aren't the same right now... she wants things for me that I don't want right now -- like getting a dining room table. Those small things make it pretty difficult to live together on a day-by-day basis. Probably someday it will be important to me to have a dining room table...but not right now.

Another 40 year old woman had the same opinion. Both mother and daughter have a stake in trying to "convince" each other of her own point of view, sometimes leading to conflict.

> I think all mothers and daughters have some conflict. My difference with my mother is in the religious area. I don't agree with the way she approaches God. This is a real area of friction -- at times I cannot talk about it in a calm way [with her]. I get upset and speak my mind and she withdraws from confrontation. The more she withdraws, the more I want to talk and convince her. I

should be more tolerant. 607

One woman, Mrs. Tong, spoke about the need to "separate" the mother and son. As a social worker she saw many cases of

> passive-agressive behavior on the part of children who could not separate from the mother...the kids do not like their situation but they do not know how to break away. 831

This had already happened with her husband's younger brother. She and her husband had already moved away from the parental household in Boston when they realized that the husband's younger brother was skipping school and getting away with it.

> He didn't finish high school. He would just go out and play ball with his friends. Mother would just accept this behavior, so we had them come down to New York. He did his high school equivalency in New York, tried several jobs, and then went to the university for a year...we really had to help him, and he is very grateful. He is happy with his marriage, his family, and his job...Once mother wanted him to have a car and told each son a different story as to why he had to have a new car. I think she came up with the money herself. The brothers would say, 'Don't indulge him.' We worked on the separation of the mother and the son. Otherwise he would have never gotten away.

During the course of the interview, it appeared that Mrs. Tong's own son, 24 years old, was facing the same issue. Mrs. Tong, herself, seemed to be unaware of a parallel in the behavior of the two men. After graduation from college, her son returned home to live and found a job nearby. Mrs. Tong said he was "wrestling with the decision of going out to get his own apartment." Eight months later he moved out to a

separate place about ten miles away. She explained, "This is closer to where he works." But it was also clear that he could see his parents as often as he or they wished.

In some cases, the price one has to pay in order to distance oneself from parents is very high. In one family, the elderly mother was admitted to the hopital with terminal cancer; she was given only a short time to live. The father was clearly in despair; he began to turn to his children to determine which one would be available to come and live with him. Suddenly two of the sons married. Their choice of marriage partners made it clear that they could not be counted on as target children to provide care for their needy father.

The focus on negotiating a satisfactory closeness also illuminated some of the atypical behavior in some families. In all families except one, children reached or exceeded the educational level of their parents. In the one exception, the father had a college degree from China, but the sons had only high school degrees. The sons entered the restaurant business; the mother appeared to discourage further education and supported their decisions. Perhaps she realized that if they continued working in Chinatown, they would continue to stay nearby. Indeed, when the mother became widowed, this proximity ensured the daily availability of her sons, and more importantly, their wives.

In some families the parents were still attempting to bind the children through acts of giving; in some cases the children refused such offers -- refused to take and refused to ask even when in need.

One daughter-in-law was about to give birth to her first child. The husband's mother asked if she could make a sweater for the baby and the daughter-in-law agreed, but added a stipulation. She "hoped" the mother wouldn't use the color green. She didn't phrase it diplomatically by saying, for example, that she liked the colors red and white. These interchanges were carried out over the telephone, so there was less opportunity to make sure of what message was intended. Was the daughter-in-law saying that she really didn't want such a gift from her husband's mother? Or was she just stuck on some color scheme for her first baby? The mother-in-law had offered generously, but now a qualification had been placed on the gift. The baby arrived, the sweater did not. The daughter-in-law learned that if she wanted to continue having these interchanges, she could not express her own personal likes and dislikes in this fashion. Her mother-in-law saw them as a rejection of her handiwork and of herself. Voicing individual preferences at this level of interchange carried too high a price.

Other children chose not to involve their parents even

when in need. A 30 year old son and his wife were planning to buy a home but found that he did not have enough money for the downpayment. He called his older brother and asked to borrow $5000 with the specific request that the brother not tell his parents about the arrangement. He felt that their father had been too critical of him in the past; he wanted to act without his father's help. Perhaps he wanted to give his father the impression that he could do it on his own. Anyway, the older brother was sworn to silence. Over the course of a number of years, the older brother was paid back, with interest. When the older brother then bought a house, he borrowed $10,000 from his parents. Interestingly enough, he explained it as borrowing only $5000 from his parents since he had loaned $5000 to his brother earlier. In his mind, the responsibility for giving out loans rested with his parents.

Later, another younger brother asked him if he could loan him money so he could buy a house. The older brother said it would be fine but added that their father would just love to lend him something. In fact, the older brother and his father had discussed this the previous Christmas; it would give the father positive pleasure to loan the younger son money. But the son refused to ask, saying, "Even though they got away pretty cheaply on me since they didn't have to pay for my schooling. And after all they bought you [the older brother] a car and he promised me but didn't." He

didn't want to tie himself to his father in this fashion but the fierceness of his conviction also indicated his uncomfortableness with the situation. Although he tried to deny it, he was still very much connected to his father. In the process he was also denying his father a certain pleasure in the proof that they had the proper "heart" for each other. As the brother said,

> You want to feel close to your parents-- after all they are your parents and always will be. You won't have another set, um? But it's often difficult.

As one 32 year old woman put it,

> Of course, you are the child and you have been getting things from your parents all your life. But now [as an adult] it's time to say I am my own person. I can't be forever depending on parents. But it always seems to be a struggle between being and doing what makes me happy and what makes them happy. And I always wonder if what it is that makes them happy, strangely enough, also makes me happy. But their idea of me isn't always the same as my idea of me. And when you take [something], it gives them the message that you're willing to be everything they want you to be. But when you say no, then you know that you've hurt them. 603

These adult children are struggling to find a balance between being separate from their parents and yet acting responsibly toward their parents. They experience a "filial anxiety", worrying about whether they can appropriately and adequately pay back their parents. They struggle with the desire to be independent of feeling obligated to parents and the knowledge that they do "owe" something to their parents. They also

realize, at some level, the harm they do to their parents by denying them the appropriate expression of concern. Unfortunately, it is the parents faced with the most uncertainty who experience greater "parental anxiety" and to some degree, shame. As one elderly woman said, "You know that friends would not make you lose face when you see them, but you also know that they are talking behind your back about the shameful situation." They are the parents who feel they have failed to live up to their parental goal of raising children who reciprocate in meaningful ways in their old age.

Family ties and the cultural ideology which supports them are an important factor in the definition of the individual's life goals and responsibilities. Clearly, the emphasis placed upon the importance of family ties varies across societies: Western observers of Asian (especially Confucian) models of family have tended to stress the constraints on the individual represented by intergenerational reponsibility, or "filial piety". By seeing this aspect of relationships only through a "cost-benefit" perspective on the individual, they have often ignored cultural dispositions felt and experienced by people in these societies. This examination of relationships in Chinese families, caught in a trans-cultural environment, reveals both the centrality of intergenerational relationships as a benefit and goal for one's life in traditional Chinese conceptualizations, as well as the areas

of ambiguity introduced by a very different Western perspective in the younger generation.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank Dr. R.A. LeVine, Dr. C. Ikels, and Dr. M. Katz for discussions on earlier versions of this work. I would also like to thank F. Shiang, S. T. Shiang, Y.Y. Tsien, H.C. Tsien, N. Li, Y.T. Li, and R.W. Tsien for helpful discussion on the concept of Heart.

2. Ten families were Mandarin-speaking and 12 families were Cantonese-speaking. Differences emerged between these two subgroups in the types of transactions that took place between family members as well as in the frequency and direction of transactions. Unfortunately, the richness of this data cannot be detailed in this short essay.

3. Money given in red envelopes were considered "lucky money"; traditionally the money was given at Chinese New Year.

4. "Blind" marriage: Neither party is introduced to the other before the actual marriage ceremony. Baker states, "the family. . . controlled the individual, for marriage was arranged for the individual, not left to his own free choice dependent on the vagaries of 'love'. . . .No matter that the husband found he did not like his wife much -- he and she were there to continue the family. . .(1979: 33-34).

REFERENCES

Baker, H.D.R. 1979. Chinese Family and Kinship. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dylan, B. 1968. "Love is a Four Letter Word" sung by Joan Baez on Any Day Now. New York: Vanguard Recordings.

Freedman, M. 1970. Lineage Organization in Southeastern China. London: The Athlone Press.

Hsu, F.L.K. 1948. Under the Ancestor's Shadow: Chinese Culture and Personality. N.Y: Columbia University Press

Ikels, C. 1980. The Coming of Age in Chinese Society: Traditional Patterns in Contemporary Hong Kong. In C.L. Fry (Ed.) Aging in Culture and Society. New York: J.F. Bergin.

Lang, O. 1946. Chinese Family and Society. New Haven:Yale University Press.

Makra, M.L. translation of The Book of Filial Piety. N.Y:St. John's University Press.

Mencius, 1895. The Book of Mencius. trans. by James Legge. The Chinese Classics. Vol. 2. Clarendon Press.

Richards, I.A. 1932. Mencius on the Mind. London:Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Shiang, J. 1984. The Significance of Transactions: Reciprocity Between Chinese Elderly and Their Adult Children Living in Boston and Its Suburbs. Unpublished Dissertation.

Yang, C.K. 1959. The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution. Cambridge: MIT Press.